NEW ACQUISITIONS

FALL 2024



JACARANDA

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ART AND ANTIQUES FROM AFRICA, OCEANIA AND THE AMERICAS

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NEW ACQUISITIONS

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As summer draws to a close, we are excited to present our latest catalog *New Acquisitions – Summer 2024*.

This online exhibition features 20 exceptional objects from diverse countries and cultures. Some pieces boast significant provenance, while others are celebrated for their intrinsic beauty, age, and artistry.

Among the highlights is a remarkable pair of male and female dance staffs for the Eshu Cult, attributed to the Master of The Owu Shango Shrine Ogo Elegba. The intact ornamentation is exceptional. Another standout is a striking necklace from the Thule culture of Mainland Alaska, combining an ivory figure with ten seal teeth, interspersed with opaque glass beads acquired from Russian traders. From Africa, we proudly present a seated Senufo divination figure, poised and exquisite from every angle. One of the rarest objects in this catalog is a large Old Bering Sea or early Punuk period sealskin bag stopper decorated with a masterly carving of a polar bear, ornamented with inlaid pyrite. We hope you enjoy an essay on this masterpiece by renowned expert Sean Mooney, chief curator of the Rock Foundation.

We are always thrilled to discover new objects from various cultures and hope you will enjoy this eclectic selection.

Dori & Daniel Rootenberg

NEW YORK CITY, SEPTEMBER 2024



1

WAR CLUB *SUPI*

MALAITA ISLAND, SOLOMON ISLANDS

19th century

Wood, coconut fiber braiding

Height: 33 in, 84 cm

PROVENANCE

Sotheby's London, May 14, 1979

Abraham Rosman (1930–2020) and Paula Rubel (1933–2018), New York City

Lillian Ball, United States. Acquired in the early 1980's.

This war club, the vernacular name for which is *supi, supe,* or *sube*, comes from Malaita Island in the Malaita Province of the Solomon Islands. Widely recognized for their unique, angular lozenge shape, *supi*-type clubs have also been found on Maramasike Island as well as other islands within the southeastern Solomons. Weapons such as these were very common in the islands of Melanesia, including the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and New Guinea. Primarily wielded in tribal conflicts, clubs made of heavy wood and occasionally fitted with stone heads were highly effective in close combat.

War clubs had other uses, too. They could be employed in agriculture, and ceremonial examples were often created for warriors' funerary rites. *Supi* also had a metaphoric role, and it is surmised that the shape of the clubs carries sexual significance. As such, men of the Kwaio culture are not allowed to carry *supi* when they are participating in courtship rituals.

This beautiful example shows a classic tapered head with raised cross design on its face and a beveled counterweight pommel at the opposite end. The grip is wrapped in coconut fiber and is heavily encrusted. Some *supi* feature coconut braiding with shells around the top edge of the grip wrapping.







2

OIL CONTAINER PLUG IN THE FORM OF A POLAR BEAR

PALEO-INUIT CULTURE, ST LAWRENCE ISLAND (SIVUQAQ)

Early Punuk period, circa 500 to 800 CE
Marine fossilized walrus ivory (*odobenus rosmarus)*, iron pyrite inlays
Height: 2 in, 5 cm; Length: 4 in, 10 cm

PROVENANCE

Excavated on St Lawrence Island in the 1990's

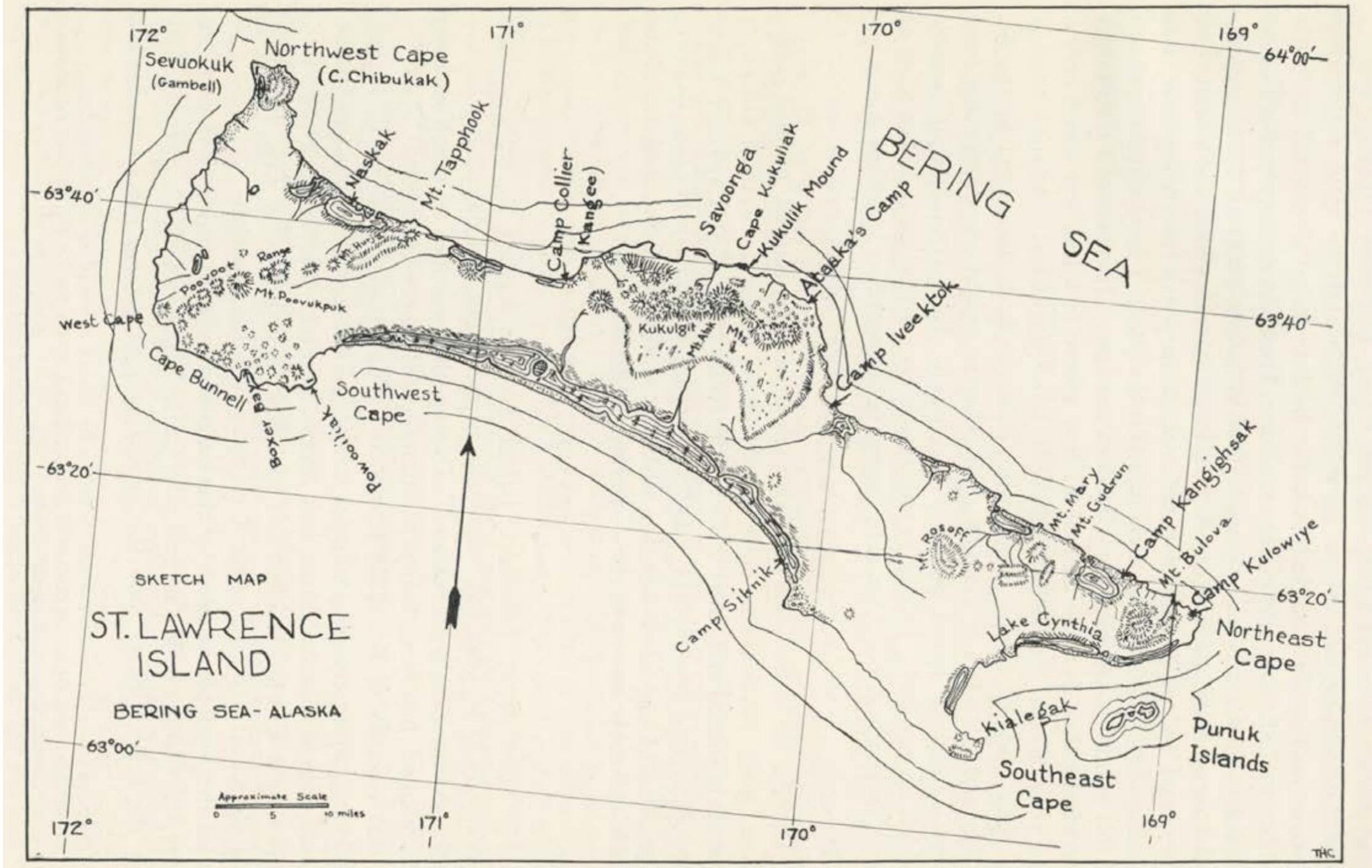
Art of the Old Bering Sea cultures

Sean Mooney, chief curator, Rock Foundation

The seat of Paleo-Inuit 'Old Bering Sea' culture was St Lawrence Island, Alaska (*Sivuqaq*, in Siberian Yupik language), which sits near the southern entrance to the Bering Strait. It is the sixth largest island in US territory, being approximately ninety miles wide and twenty-two miles across, with a mountain 2000 feet high. People have inhabited the island for at least 3,000 years, and possibly millennia longer. Today, it is home to only two permanent villages, Savoonga and Gambell (traditionally known as *Sivuqaq,* the name also applied to the entire island), with a total population of less than 800 inhabitants. As recently as the mid 19th century, there were more than 2000 people living there, scattered across at least ten permanent villages, but a great famine in 1878-80 decimated the population. During the ancient Old Bering Sea cultural phases, coastal villages were estimated to have been no more than 100 or 200 people, as they are in many Alaskan coastal settlements today. Nonetheless, St Lawrence Island sits along the migratory path of walrus, whale, seal and innumerable bird species, providing life-sustaining resources in the midst of what would otherwise be a harsh arctic environment.

St Lawrence Island holds several important archeological sites, most notably the Kukulik mound near Savoonga, excavated by Otto Geist between 1928 and 1936, and the Okvik and Punuk sites, excavated by Geist and Henry B. Collins in the 1930s. Other ancient village sites were excavated by Collins and others near Gambell, at the western side of the island. These and other archeological sites were originally excavated by native villagers, who harvested the sites for materials to recycle. Additional archeological sites on the nearby Siberian coast have been under excavation for decades (St Lawrence Island lies much closer to Siberia than to mainland Alaska, and its current inhabitants are culturally Siberian Yupik, rather than Iñupiat, their cousins on the Alaskan mainland). From these archeological digs, a system of dating artifacts by a confluence of depth found and corresponding stylistic variations was developed by Collins, dividing them into a system of cultural phases. We still use these stylistic distinctions today as naming conventions and guides for dating the artifacts. However, it is very difficult to conclusively date artifacts within these cultural periods, and there are numerous examples of unique or transitional styles.

Roughly speaking, then, Paleo-Inuit artifacts fall into the following general categories:



Map 2.—St. Lawrence Island.

Map of St Lawrence Island, from field report on the Kukulik Mound excavation, 1934, by Otto Geist, Smithsonian Institution.

Old Bering Sea I, also known as the Okvik period (ca. 250 BCE – 100 CE)
Old Bering Sea II (ca. 100–300 CE)
Old Bering Sea III (ca. 300–500 CE)
The Punuk period (ca. 500–1000 CE)
The Western Thule tradition (ca. 1000–1800 CE)

Okvik is the earliest known phase of Paleo-Inuit culture, distinguished mainly by carvings of doll-like human representations with a deceptively monumental appearance belying their small scale. The term Okvik comes from one of the earliest known hunting sites on the island, and in Siberian Yupik language means 'the place where walrus come ashore.' Okvik artifacts also include harpoon components, various tools, ornaments and animal representations. But the Okvik doll is distinctive, and its presence and curious aspect is often cited as evidence of shamanism, of a personal order. They appear as stoic, totemic figures, with elongated noses and heads, truncated torsos, usually without arms or legs (though not always), and are almost modern-looking to audiences accustomed to Cubist and other European art. Elegantly carved with stone tools, their bodies are

typically decorated with surface patterns of straight lines, deeply engraved, sometimes in radiating patterns. These engravings might emphasize skeletal marks or tattoo patterns, but however we read them, they imbue the dolls with a suggestive supernaturalism. One explanation for them, if parallel customs in modern times are considered, is that they were house dolls, protective amulets, or fertility figures. Most dolls are presented as female, with anatomical features suggestive of birthing practices recorded in modern times. Another interpretation is that Okvik dolls were the personal accoutrements of a shaman, and served a ritual purpose, now lost, perhaps related to fertility or to hunting.

The material culture of the Old Bering Sea and later periods was most usually carved from walrus tusk ivory, the most abundant resource material to be found on Saint Lawrence Island. Pacific Walrus (*odobenus rosmarus*) and varieties of seal species beach themselves on the island in large numbers. Without trees, wood found on the island arrived solely as driftwood, washed ashore with the eastward Yukon delta as its most likely source, or taken from the closer Siberian coast. Some, quite rare, examples of wood carving survive, and we know that wood and whale rib bones were utilized to construct houses and meat cache structures since the earliest times of inhabitance. Walrus ivory, however, survived well-preserved not only because of its dense material quality, but for the fact that Old Bering Sea artifacts became buried in ice and permafrost, the permanently frozen soil of arctic lands. Interment in permafrost for centuries, often in conjunction with food waste, animal fats or other organic materials, has imparted the ivory with a rich coloration and patina. Ivory carvings from the Okvik period are often a deep brown, almost black, appearing nothing like the bright white and cream colors of new ivory. We must keep in mind that the carvings we see today would have originally had a very different, bright appearance.

In addition to dolls and other human representations, nearly all carved ivory items in Old Bering Sea society was carved into intricate, highly decorated, forms, often with animal effigies modeled upon the birds, fish and mammals living on and near St Lawrence Island. This was especially true of anything associated with hunting or fishing. Especially ornamented were the parts of the harpoon, which was certainly the single most important instrument for survival in the region. Used for hunting seal, walrus, and eventually whales, it was constructed of modular components and represented a tremendous technological advancement.

What is significant about the highly decorated harpoon components is that they share motifs with many other tools used for processing animal skins, meat, and fats, as well as related tools for fishing or otherwise interacting with game of any kind. The motifs range wildly: they include the complex 'animal-style' forms shared with Scythian and ancient Chinese art, where the mouths of interlocking animals devour one another. Surface patterns suggestive of wings, mouths, eyes, nostrils, and abstract lines and dots perform a whirlwind of activity across the carvings. There is a great deal of visual movement and linear complexity, and arctic artists of the Old Bering Sea seemingly delighted in the use of visual puns, where an animal form may reveal another animal, or a human face, when turned or inverted. These oft-hidden figures belie the spiritual importance underlying all decorated hunting tools and accoutrements.

In the animistic practices of traditional arctic societies, all living beings, and even inanimate objects – but especially game animals, birds and fish – are conceived as imbued with a spirit, representative of consciousness. The common term for this spirit is *inua*, a word that implies a human essence in its etymology (*inu-* being the root term for 'person,' i.e., *Inuit* is the plural, 'the people'). The *inua* consciousness is a foundational principle in the conception of spiritual order, and as such the *inua* figure is often represented in human form, or as a hybrid animal. The *inua* is considered the 'personal human' of each animal possessing it, allowing



hunters to interrelate with them in a continuous cycle. I interpret the iconography of these intricate carvings to follow the cultural belief in spiritual reincarnation, as it is traditionally expressed by the presence of *inua* figures.

As such, carving was of critical importance to village survival. To be a successful hunter in the arctic meant that one had to pay respect to a hunted animal's *inua*, its spirit, since it was thought that an animal would return only to those hunters who observed the rituals dictated by their cosmology. Traditional Yuit people (and, we assume, their ancestors of 2000 years ago) believed there to be a fixed number of *inua* that inhabit the bodies of animals and that when one was killed, the *inua* reincarnated, usually as another such animal, and remembered the hunter who took its life. Provided that due respect and humility was observed and the appropriate rites performed, it would eventually return to that same hunter to offer itself again. A chief manifestation of proper honoring of the animal was the elaborate decoration of the hunter's tools, with the most beautiful weapons belonging, by default, to the most successful hunter. In Old Bering Sea times, then, we see the remarkable example of a society where one's skill as an artist was crucial to the very survival of oneself, family, and community. In the extraordinary universe of the arctic, life without art cannot exist.

To me, this cyclical belief system helps explain the remarkable accomplishment of Old Bering Sea art. In the tiny arctic communities of *Sevuqaq*, thousands of years ago, skilled carvers used stone tools to create extraordinary beauty, for the purpose of appeasing the spirits of the animals they relied upon for life. We should also remember that the Okvik and early Old Bering Sea period was roughly contemporary to the Roman Empire, and produced its own equivalently important culture and art, while under harsh arctic conditions, mostly in the dark of long northern winters. This realization makes the art of ancient arctic hunters all the more admirable and striking.

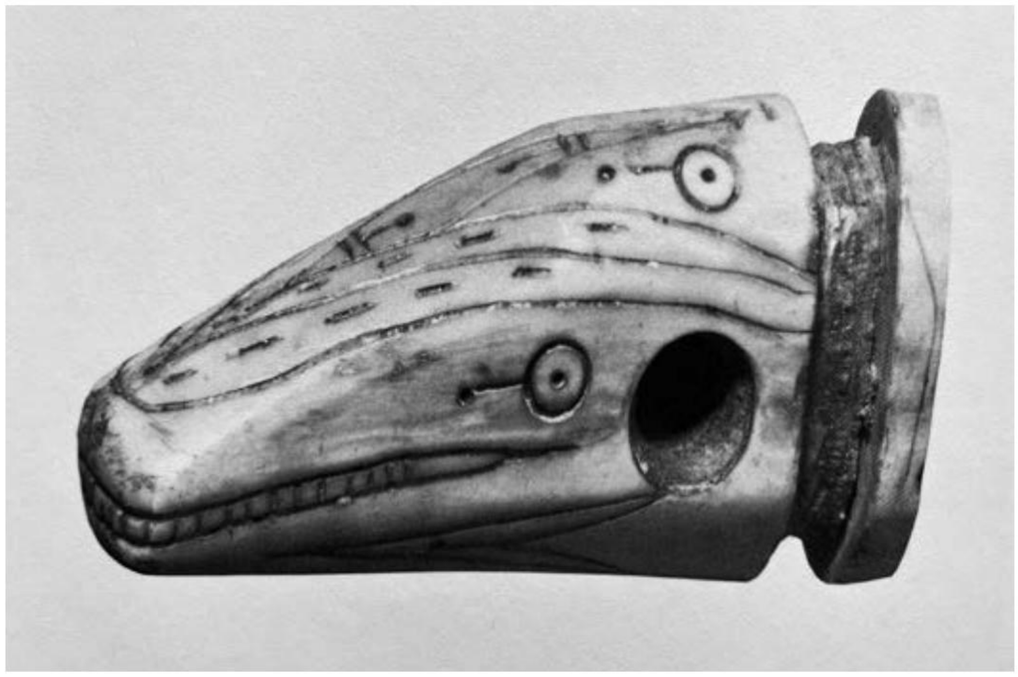
The object illustrated in this catalogue is a fine example



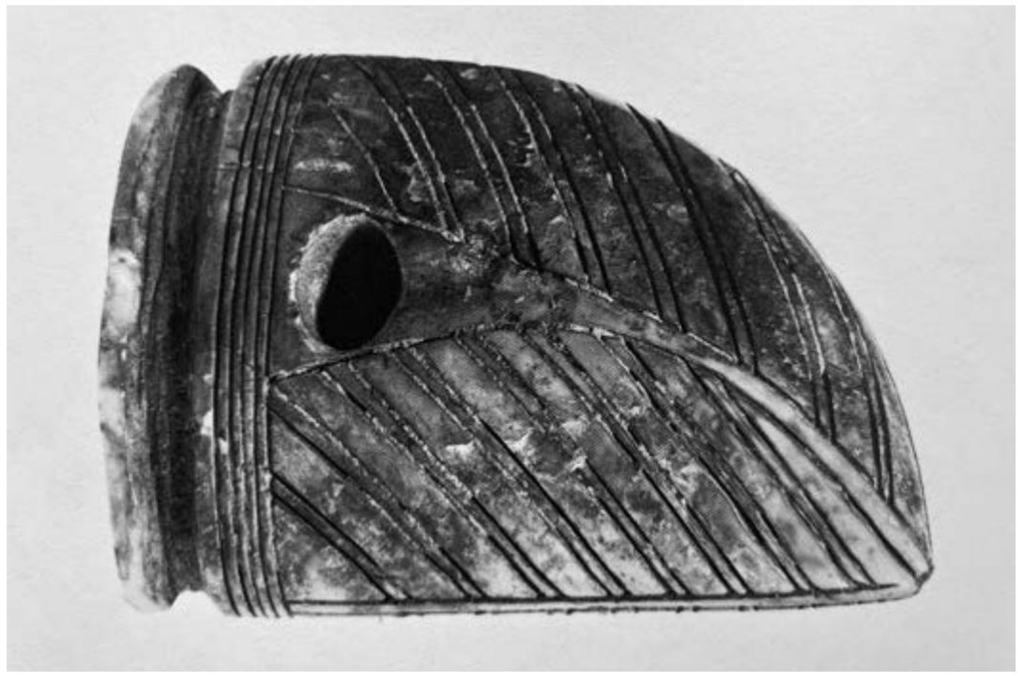
Whale oil container plug with whale head design. Paleo-Inuit culture, Sevuqaq early Western Thule period, ca. 1000–1400 CE
walrus ivory, 2.75 x 2 x 1 inches (7 x 4.8 x 2.5 cm)
Carpenter Collection of Arctic Art, a7752
Rock Foundation collection at The Menil Collection, Houston

of the functional, spiritual and aesthetic principles of Old Bering Sea culture. Functionally, we may interpret it as a form similar to a 'wound plug,' used during traditional hunting of seals. Such devices would utilize the pointed end of the ivory to insert into a harpoon wound, preventing the total loss of the animal's blood and also providing a secure place to lash ties to aid in hauling in the hunted game. An inverted form of the wound plug is, however, more likely to be the object seen here. Given that this particular tool is elegantly carved into the form of a bear's head, and that the





Container plug
Paleo-Inuit culture, Sevuqaq Punuk period, ca. 500–800 CE
walrus ivory, 4 inches (9.8 cm)
Private collection
Illustrated in Allen Wardwell, *Ancient Ivories of the Bering Strait*, p. 110, plate 147



Container plug
Paleo-Inuit culture, Sevuqaq Punuk period, ca. 500–800 CE
walrus ivory, 4.65 inches (11.9 cm)
National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, 349502
Field collected in St Lawrence Island by Ales Hrdlicka for the Smithsonian in 1929, with Otto Geist, his recorded title for this object is 'ivory war club.'
Published in 1986, it is described by Allen Wardwell as 'object of unknown use.'(from *Ancient Ivories of the Bering Strait*, p. 110, plate 146)

opposite, grooved end of the ivory is left undecorated, it is more likely that this curious device was used somewhat like a cork in a wine bottle, to create a 'stopper' for a container fashioned from seal skin. Used as such, the decorated bear's head would protrude from the opening, and the grooved end inserted into the container, with rawhide or reed lashing tied around the groove to close it. This explanation would also account for the prominent hole through the tool, which would provide a secure place to tie the lashing, as well as allow for the container to be suspended for carrying or hanging inside a dwelling.

Animal forms used to decorate tools often provide a sort of 'label' or 'icon' to describe its association. Fishing boxes containing lures, darts and harpoon components, for example, are usually decorated with ivory carvings of fish. Here, in what is seemingly a bear (albeit very much reduced in form to its simple ears, eyes, and closed mouth), we might guess that the object was used as the closure for a container used to store rendered bear fat. While Polar bear is not generally hunted for its meat, encounters with them by hunters are often fatal for either party. Wasting nothing, bear fat might be rendered for cooking and lamp oil, meat cooked, and skins (perhaps the most valued asset of the bear) processed for clothing and blankets.

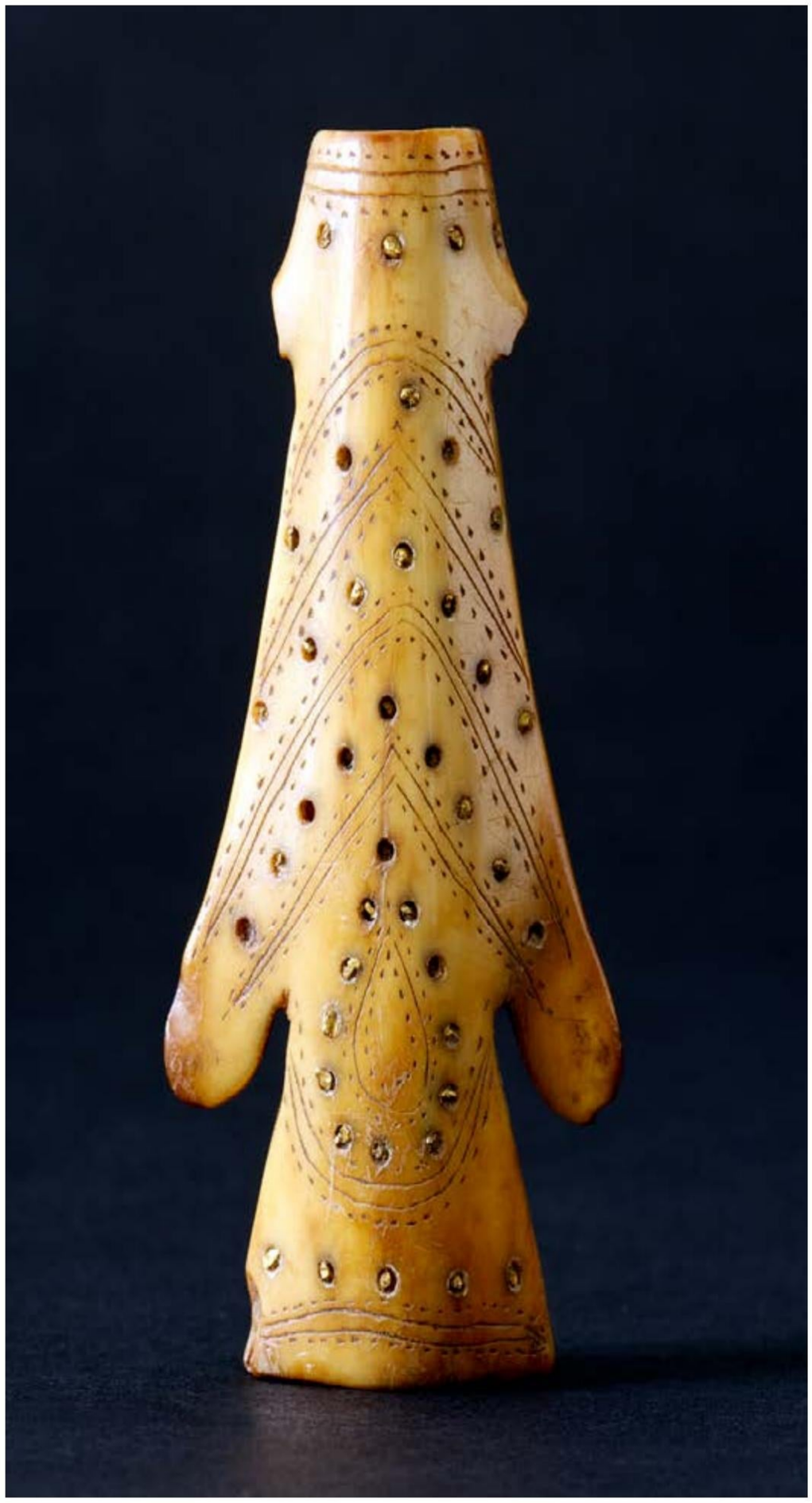
Notable here is the linear decoration across the surface of the bear's head. What I might describe as a stitching pattern, of a solid line attended with dashes, traces gracefully across the skeletal head. We see this sort of patterning in most Old Bering Sea art, in which the skeletal underlines of a living being are suggested, lending the animal a spiritual aspect. It connotes ancestral lineage, but also simply a reminder that what remains of life is but the hard skeleton within.

Using the categories established by Collins and Geist in



the early 20th century, scholars Allen Wardwell (in his book *Ancient Eskimo Ivories of the Bering Strait*, 1986) and Dorothy Jean Ray (in *Artists of the Tundra and Sea*, 1961) illustrated the various qualities and surface designs of the 'stitching patterns' seen in this bear. Judging by the color of the ivory and these etched designs, I understand this object to most likely be from the early Punuk phase, approximately 500–800 CE. While it shares some of the design qualities of the earlier OBS II phase, its spare carving and simplified pattern suggest the Punuk period, along with the fact that known comparable examples of this form are mostly from this time or later. This may have something to do with changing hunting technology or food storage needs over time.

A curious design detail in relation to the linear decoration is the deliberate insertion of pyrite inlays. Their placements are significant: in the ears, below the eyes beneath the tear ducts, in the center of the forehead, near the nostrils, and at the corners of the mouth. These all have spiritual meanings, particularly the inlays found at the corners of the mouth. These are in the same position as a human elder might wear ivory labrets, to signify status and wisdom. A Polar bear certainly has gravitas and is taken seriously. Originally, I suspect that the inlays had been made of whale baleen, the soft jawbone material that is black in color, which would have visually offset the (originally) white ivory. There are numerous examples of this decorative combination of materials in Paleo-Inuit art. I know of only one other example where such inlays were replaced with pyrite, an elegant OBS II needle case in the Carpenter Collection (A8490). It is a striking, unexpected effect. It is notable that this OBS II needle case has a nearly identical 'stitching design' pattern all over its surface, much like our friendly bear here. Needle cases were, of course, used to contain women's sewing tools, and sometimes took feminine human forms. Could our bear-shaped tool be related to her?



Needle case
Paleo-Inuit culture, Sevuqaq, Mayughaaq site
Old Bering Sea II period, ca. 100–300 CE
walrus ivory with pyrite inlays, 3 x 1.5 x 0.5 in. (7.6 x 3.8 x 1.3 cm)
Carpenter Collection of Arctic Art, A8490
Rock Foundation collection at The Menil Collection, Houston



3

FEMALE ANTELOPE WITH CHILD HEADDRESS *CI WARA*

BAMANA, MALI

Early 20th century

Wood, metal, fabric

Height: 33 ¼ in, 84 ½ cm

PROVENANCE

Galerie Robert Duperrier, Paris

Private collection, New York. Acquired from the above in 1976

Thence by descent through their heirs

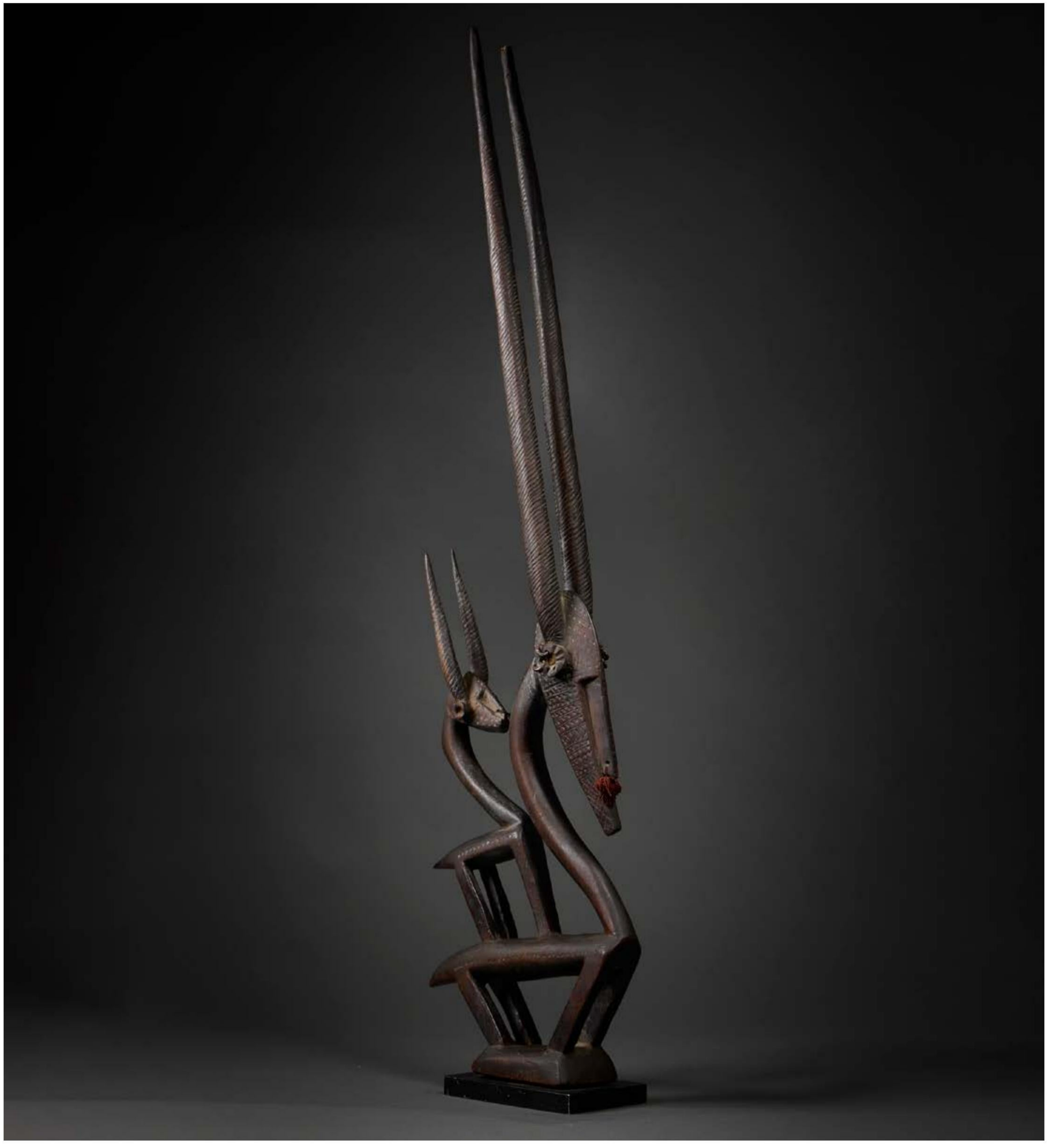
Among the Bamana, oral tradition credits the mythical Ci Wara – a divine being half human and half animal – with the introduction of agriculture to their people. Under Ci Wara's guidance, humans first learned to cultivate the land and became prosperous and able farmers. But when they grew careless and wasteful, Ci Wara is said to have buried himself in the earth. To honor Ci Wara's memory, the Bamana created the zoomorphic *boli*, an imposing power object in which his spirit could reside, and carved figural headdresses, also called *ci wara*, to represent him.

Ci wara combine antelope features with those of other animals more intimately connected to the soil, such as the aardvark and pangolin. The elegant and tapered head, neck, ears, and horns are modeled on antelope forms, while the lower body of the sculpture refers to the aardvark. These headdresses are typically characterized by fine decoration with pierced openwork designs and finely incised geometric patterns.

Dances are performed with the *ci wara* to encourage Bamana farmers as they work in the fields and praise their efforts upon their return. The performances always feature a pair of headdresses, one male and one female, worn by two young male dancers accompanied by female singers. The performers' costumes are made of long raffia fibers that stretch from the base of the headdress to the ground, concealing their bodies. These fiber mantles are darkly dyed and sway and bounce with the dancers' antelope-inspired movements. In a dramatic convergence of motion, sound, and iconography, the dance evokes the cooperation of the agricultural elements – earth, sun, and water – upon which all humanity depends.

The *ci wara* tradition remains one of the most widely recognized in all of African art. Over time, the sculptures, costumes, and songs have grown and changed along with Bamana culture itself. Different regions within Bamana society display unique sculptural variations of *ci wara* iconography. Outside of Africa, their beauty notably touched the imaginations of early twentieth-century artists such as Constantin Brancusi and Ferdinand Léger, who were impressed by their juxtaposition of negative and positive space and two-dimensional sculptural design.

The present example shows a pair of figures, a smaller standing atop a larger. This configuration is believed to symbolize the fundamental relationship of humanity, the child, and the parental Earth. The larger figure shows a beautifully structured, elongated and geometric visage, held upon a sinuous neck. In classic style, the main figure is crowned with fantastically tapered horns that spear skyward. Delicate incision work sends ridges down the length of both figures' horns, and adorns their faces with patterns of points.











4

SEATED FEMALE DIVINATION FIGURE *TUGU*

SENUFO, IVORY COAST

Early 20th century

Wood, metal, palm oil

Height: 11 ¼ in, 28 ½ cm

PROVENANCE

Parke Bernet Auctions, November, 1970

Private collection, New York

Thence by descent through their heirs

Male-female figural pairs known as *tugubele* are the most important objects used in Senufo divination. Placed before a diviner and client during a consultation, the sculptures embody bush spirits that offer guidance to those who seek their help. Novice diviners often use small copper alloy figures, while established ones might commission a wood sculpture from a carver or a blacksmith. Possessing the tools required for carving, blacksmiths frequently perform this task in West African societies. Specific details that individualize the spirit, such as armbands or other accoutrements, often appear in a diviner's or artist's dreams. Their inclusion is highly valued as they suggest a close relationship between diviner and spirit.

Regardless of material or degree of complexity, a *tugu's* beauty must appeal to the spirit associated with it. Like this work, most have oiled black surfaces that are considered attractive. Female figures display the radiating scarification pattern around the navel known as 'mother of twins' or 'mother's navel,' identifying a woman who has been initiated into Senufo society. During ceremonies, *tugubele* might be joined by additional figures such as twins or a horse and rider.

This seated female *tugu* shows a lovely geometric morphology, with jaw and breasts jutting dramatically in parallel below a high coiffure. The vertical profile is strong and erect, with a taut curve sweeping through the back from the shoulders to the buttocks. Bent arms encircled with bands poise the hands between the projecting navel and the stylized skirt wrapping the seated hips. Incised and raised details depict earrings and facial scarifications. The attitude and aspect of the figure is composed and alert, ready to hear the appeal of the diviner.











5

HEAD OF A MAN

DOGON, MALI

19th century or earlier

Wood

Height: 6 ½ in, 16 ½ cm

PROVENANCE

Private collection, USA (acquired in the 1970's from Phillips Auction House, New York)

This ancient head is a remnant from a full-bodied male Dogon figure. The projecting, stylized beard identifies the subject as an elder, an individual whose age and experience entitle him to participate in all the most important affairs of Dogon society. Features of the face are minimal, with blank, almond-shaped eyes traced out in incisions above a prognathic mouth. The surrounding features of the head are heavy, helmet-like, framing the enigmatic visage, and supported by a stout neck. Extreme erosion enriches the surface with a rough and highly organic texture, transforming it, upon close inspection, into an abstract map of time-worn fissures and patinations.

The Dogon live in the elevated rocky heights of Mali's Bandiagara Escarpment, where the dry climate preserves Dogon antiquities far longer than is usual for African wood sculpture. If radiocarbon tested, this work and others like it could date back many hundreds of years.

While the exact functions and meanings of Dogon figures remain unknown, scholars agree that Dogon sculptures were created for shrines. They depicted spirits of fertility, a group that included real and mythical ancestors, women who died in childbirth, and water spirits. Given their desert habitation, propitiation of fertility was a matter of survival. One of the most well-known figural forms in the Dogon corpus, a lone figure with raised arms, has been interpreted as an appeal for rain.











6

MALE AND FEMALE DANCE STAFFS FOR THE ESHU CULT ATTRIBUTED TO THE MASTER OF THE OWU SHANGO SHRINE *OGO ELEGBA*

YORUBA, NIGERIA

Late 19th / early 20th century

Wood, metal, leather, cowrie shells

Height: 32 ½ in, 82 ½ cm

PROVENANCE

Gilbert Graham (1927–2003), Long Island, New York

Private collection, California

Pace Primitive, New York, 2003

Private collection, New York

Thence by descent through their heirs

EXHIBITION HISTORY

Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, New York, 2016

PUBLICATION HISTORY

Eshu: The Divine Trickster, George Chemeche. Illustrated p. 168/169

This pair of decorated figures were created as dance staffs for the cult of Eshu, trickster god of the Yoruba, an affiliation made clear by their high and bulbous coiffures. The female figure holds a calabash bottle, the male a large flute. Eyelids and cheeks are profusely scored, and the texture of both figures shows a worn smoothness that suggests long use.

Around the waists of both figures are slung leather skirts from which descend braided strips hung heavy with ornamentation: hundreds of cowrie shells, symbolizing wealth, along with a mixture of wood and metal objects including spoons, combs, bells, and flasks. Additional carved figures are attached with the assemblage, hanging upside down.

Eshu (also called Elegba) is a complex deity who brings messages and wealth, protects ritual traditions, and presides over places of transition, such as crossroads and thresholds. He also embodies aspects of paradox. The female/male pairing of dance staffs represents his power to flow between genders, transform death into life through birth, and quell conflict between the sexes.

The carver of this pair of staffs has been identified as the 'Master of the Owu Shango Shrine,' an epithet coined by Deborah Stokes Hammer and Jeffrey S. Hammer in 1986. Their attribution, which involved findings by R.F. Thompson, is based on a Shango staff in the Lagos National Museum, and was more recently substantiated by a number of other works which came to light, including other Shango staffs in the Dimondstein and U. Voorhuis Collections, as well as quite a few *ibeji* figures. Thus far, this is the only pair of Eshu staffs that has been connected with any certainty to this master artist.





MALE AND FEMALE DANCE STAFFS FOR THE ESHU CULT ATTRIBUTED TO THE MASTER OF THE OWU SHANGO SHRINE OGO ELEGBA







7

GOLI DANCE MASK *KPLE KPLE*

BAULE, IVORY COAST

First half 20th century

Wood, natural pigments

Height: 16 in, 40 ½ cm, Width: 7 in, 18 cm

PROVENANCE

Parke Bernet Auction, New York, October, 1971

Private collection, New York

Thence by descent through his heirs

Goli is a traditional dance and masquerade of the Baule people of Ivory Coast. It originated among the Wan people, neighbors of the Baule, and was adopted by the Baule between 1900 and 1910, perhaps in response to the disruption caused by European colonialism. Today it is the dominant traditional dance form, gradually replacing all others. It may be performed on important occasions such as funerals, or for entertainment. In any context, the enactment of the dance is a considerable feat – a single performance lasts an entire day.

The two dancers involved wear four different types of traditional masks in a prescribed order: first the disc-shaped *kple kple,* like the one offered here, second the antelope- and crocodile-inspired *goli glen*, then the ram-horned *kpan pre,* and finally the human-faced *kpan*, with crested hair. The symbolism of each mask is complex. At each stage, one mask is 'male' and another 'female,' representing aspects of one individual but differentiated by certain details (for example, the male *kple kple* is red and the female is black). The *kple kple* and the *goli glen* together constitute the 'female' half of the dance.

The present mask strikes an immediate impression with its white-circled, almond-shaped and staring eyes, with bowed horns rising above, the shapes of each echoing the other. The stacked, double-round composition creates a beautiful figure-eight flow through the silhouette, all centered by the mask's arresting gaze.

An old collection number, #10042, is found on the back.







8

BOW

SOUTH ANDAMAN ISLANDS, INDIAN OCEAN

19th century

Wood, sinew

Height: 66 in, 168 cm

PROVENANCE

Joe Gerena (1949–2012), New York City

Lillian Ball, New York. Acquired in the 1980's

This rare single-stave, paddle-shaped bow is found in the southern Andaman Islands and is made by the indigenous Jarawa people. These bows are highly prized by collectors for their pure and beautiful forms.

While the Jarawa people's genetic history in the region is thought to stretch back at least 60,000 years, this group is currently on the verge of disappearance and is designated by the Indian government as a 'heritage tribe.' The Jarawa population was abruptly devastated in the 1870's due to diseases brought by British colonists, after which they withdrew deeper into the forests. Their reclusive way of life prevents a certain accounting of their numbers, but in the 1950's it was estimated their population was around 700, and in the present day it is even fewer.

The Andaman bow is composed of a pair of tapering paddle shapes joined by a narrow handle in the center. First cutting the piece to a roughly finished state with an adze, the bow-maker would refine and thin down the surface and silhouette with a sharpened boar tusk. Once smoothed out, the bow was sometimes adorned with dogtooth patterns and waxed. The terminals of the bow were wrapped with cord to create a catch point for the bowstring, which itself was made of hand-rolled fiber. Arrows were made of bamboo with a foreshaft of hardwood, a technique also seen in the Pacific Islands.

It is unknown how the double-paddle shape of this type of bow originated. It is not entirely unique to the Andaman Islands, however; similar shapes have occasionally been found among the native peoples of Oregon, as well as the composite bows of Alaskan communities. An important and distinguishing characteristic of both the Andaman and the Oregon types is that they are reflex bows, bending the opposite direction of their resting curve when drawn.







9

ENGRAVED BOW DRILL

INUIT PEOPLE, ALASKA

19th century

Walrus ivory

Length: 16 in, 40 ½ cm

PROVENANCE

Philip Isaacson (1924–2013), Maine, USA

Thence by descent to his heirs

This rare bow drill was one of many essential survival tools for Northern Indigenous carvers in the nineteenth century. It was used by attaching a piece of leather or cord through the holes at both ends, which was itself wrapped around a wooden shaft positioned between the holes. When the shaft was held in place by a special mouthpiece or by an assistant, quick lateral movement of the bow caused the shaft to whirl with great speed, allowing the shaft to act as a firestarter or hole-borer.

Although many items of bone or ivory received decoration, bow drills were often worked with the most extensive detailing. This bow drill is profusely decorated on one side with an incised tableau depicting herds of caribou and a solitary hunter in the center. On the reverse are scenes of men hunting in umiaks and wielding harpoons, as well as multiple images of caribou with their young. In winter, the Inuit hunted marine mammals (seals, walruses, and cetaceans) and in summer they moved inland from the coast, hunting caribou, fishing in the rivers and lakes, snaring birds and taking their eggs, and gathering berries and herbs.

Bow drills were used throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the scenes with which they were decorated provided a record of everyday life as well as the changes and interactions that came from contact with Europeans and Americans. Their prevalence began to diminish with the establishment of American trading companies following the Alaska Purchase in 1867. These enterprises expanded the trade in engraved curios, reselling them to growing markets along the Inside Passage of southeast Alaska and on the west coast of the United States. By the late nineteenth century, demand for engraved ivory had shifted to forms better suited to the souvenir industry, and bow drills eventually ceased to be produced.






45188



10

MINIATURE MASK

DAN, IVORY COAST

Early 20th century

Wood

Height: 2 in, 5 cm

PROVENANCE

Private collection, New York

Thence by descent through his heirs

Most Dan masks, and those of the culturally related peoples of Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, are commonly executed in a miniature form, ranging in height form between two and eight inches. The most common mask type represented in this format is *deangle* (an attractive mask with slit eyes, which demonstrates a feminine behavior) while the least common miniature forms are aggressive masks with tubular eyes and animal mouths. Anyone who has a spiritual connection with a mask, or whose family owns an important mask, is entitled to commission a miniature.

Miniature masks are referred to by a variety of names. The most common is *ma go* ('small head'), but other epithets include *yi luo po* ('thing which water is poured over'), *gba po* ('thing which is fed'), or *nyonkula* ('substitute for the ancestors'). In keeping with this multiplicity of identities, they fulfill a range of different functions. They serve as portable and personal surrogates that share the power and protective force of the full-sized mask they depict. Carved to embody tutelary spirits, they testify to the presence of the spirit associated with a large masquerade. When a maskette's owner is traveling, it provides a means of identification for him outside his immediate community. It is from this latter role that the commonly used term 'passport mask' originates.

Although women do not ordinarily have access to masks, those from families with a strong connection to a specific mask may commission a miniature to preserve ties to their own family identity after they marry. Diviners can also advise individuals to commission a miniature mask for preventative, protective, or curative purposes.

While they are primarily the personal property of an individual, miniature masks may also play a communal role in secret societies. They are among the protective objects displayed at men's society meetings, and can be shown to new initiates. On these occasions they are interpreted to be representations of major benevolent spirits, and are used as sacred objects upon which oaths are sworn. They are often attached to other powerful objects such as leather pouches or antelope horns filled with medicines. In this context, their reverse sides can also be packed with charges of magical ingredients.

Whether personal or collective, miniature masks must

be ‘fed’ regularly in order to retain their strength and be of help to their owners. Offerings of food may be set before them, or rubbed or poured directly onto them. Blood from a sacrificial chicken might be applied to them on particular occasions. This diverse range of potential offerings and methods of use explain the marked variety observed in their surface patinas.

The maskette presented here conforms to the classic *deangle* type. It is quite petite at only two inches in height, but projects the same sense of quiet power as its full-size counterparts. The strength and harmony of its proportions – with its proud brow, tapering face, geometric features and concave eyeline – are masterful, and capture the striking grace of the *deangle* in accurate miniature.





11

ZOOMORPHIC MASK *GYE*

GURO, IVORY COAST

Late 19th century

Wood, metal

Height: 20 in, 51 cm

PROVENANCE

Harry A. Franklin (1904–1983), Los Angeles

Sotheby's, New York, 21 April 1990. Lot 106.

Private collection, USA

PUBLICATION HISTORY

Bacquart (Jean-Baptiste), ***T****he Tribal Arts of Africa*, London: Thames & Hudson, *L'Art tribal d'Afrique Noire*, Paris: Editions Assouline, 1998:40, #3

The *gye* is one of the most important masks used by the Guro people of Côte d'Ivoire. Representing mythical animals, they often present a hybrid form that fuses characteristics of two or more creatures, frequently feline, ungulate, and human. *Gye* masks appear in a variety of important ritual and social contexts and hold the authority to adjudicate disputes, negotiate treaties, and make critical community decisions. Athletic dancers perform the *gye* masquerade in costumes of knotted fiber that conceal their entire bodies.

This mask shows a fierce expression with a gaping mouth, domed face with wide eyes, and a comb-like rack of horns set transversely atop the head in a kind of crest. Small, round ears are set back toward the edges of the head. The circular, staring eyes express intense energy and, together with the toothed jaws, which protrude from the lower face somewhat in the manner of a beak, conjure an impression of wild vitality.











12

MATERNITY FIGURE

ANYI OR ATTIE, IVORY COAST OR GHANA

Early 20th century

Wood, glass beads, metal

Height: 17 in, 43 cm

PROVENANCE

Charles Ratton (1895–1986), Paris

Anonymous seller, 1986

Sotheby's, New York, 'Important Tribal Art,' 18 November 1986.

Lot 105.

Private collection, USA

Maternity figures appear in many forms and traditions across sub-Saharan Africa. Sometimes representing protective ancestral spirits, they are often created to support the fertility of an aspiring mother and to ensure a safe and successful birth for both the mother and the expected child. While their morphology varies, they are united in their expression of the importance of motherhood, honoring the central role of women in the continuity and nurturing of the community.

This lovely free-standing figure depicts a nursing mother cradling her infant child. Her body is robust and youthful, with strong, round limbs and upright posture, tall neck, and a large head with impressive coiffure. An expression of serenity and joy graces her face, with softly modeled brows and a subtle smile. Beaded accessories are found at the ears and encircling the legs and ankle.

Possessing and displaying figures such as this one could be a sign of social status within the community. They were often associated with women who were respected for their fertility and had raised many children.

A vertical crack on the belly of this figure has been repaired. For another example by the same hand or atelier, see accession number 2016.37.46 in the Crocker Museum, Sacramento, USA.







13

HELMET MASK BY THE NGUABU MASTER (ACTIVE 1920–1950) *SOWEI*

MENDE, SIERRA LEONE

First half 20th century

Wood, beads, metal

Height: 16 in, 40 cm

PROVENANCE

Private collection, California

This stunning helmet mask, known as *sowei*, is a work of ritual regalia used by the all-female Sande society, a powerful women's association responsible for the education and moral development of its members. The influence of Sande is widespread in and around Mende territory, and its traditions are found among the Sherbro in Sierra Leone as well as the Bassa and Vai in Liberia.

Sowei represent the guardian spirit of Sande and are worn by the society's leaders during the initiation rites of young women into adulthood. Embodying ideal feminine traits, their symbolic features confer spiritual power upon their wearers. While some of their details differ, they are typically exquisitely carved and show a highly elaborate coiffure above a small face with smooth forehead, slit eyes, diminutive mouth, and a ringed neck.

This recently rediscovered masterpiece is a beautiful example with crisp, detailed carving and excellent composition. The coiffure, always the lavish focal point of these masks, is a fantastic array of sharp and rounded motifs resembling leaves, petals and medallions, all arranged in the manner of a crown. Angled scarification patterns accent the face below each eye, echoing the graceful striations of the hair that firmly curtains the brow. A dark patina provides high contrast and lustrous highlights.

For a similar mask by the same hand, see Schweizer, *Visions of Grace: 100 Masterpieces from the Collection of Daniel and Marian Malcolm*, Milan: 5 Continents, 2014:58-59, #18 and Petridis et al., *The Language of Beauty in African Art*, Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2022:140, #80.











14

SEATED BACK-TO-BACK FIGURES *AKUABA*

AKAN, GHANA

First half 20th century

Wood

Height: 8 ½ in, 21 ½ cm

PROVENANCE

Maurice Ratton (1903–1973), Paris, sold in 1969

Moussa Diane, Bamako & Paris

Private collection, USA

Disk-headed *akuaba* figures are perhaps one of the most iconic forms in the African figural corpus. They are ritually consecrated images that depict children and are carried by aspiring mothers who seek the aid of community spirits to overcome barrenness. Their use arose out of an Akan legend about a woman named Akua, who used such a figure for exactly this purpose. *Akuaba* ('Akua's child') are often carried flat against the back, wrapped in skirts, exactly as a human child would be. After successfully influencing a pregnancy, they are placed in shrines as a testament to the power of the spirits, or they are kept by the family as a cherished reminder of their child.

Akuaba are often single figures, some with abstract, tubular bodies and others with fully modeled limbs. The example offered here is of a significantly rarer type, featuring a pair of figures positioned back to back and seated upon a large stool. While unusual in composition, the figures themselves bear the classic *akuaba* hallmarks: a large, flat, disk-shaped head connected by a ringed neck to horizontally outstretched arms, and joined eyebrows and nose in simple relief. They are carved in full length, with a relatively wide torso. Scarification motifs are found beneath the eyes and between the small breasts, and a prominent umbilicus shows forth from the abdomen.

An old collection number (550) is found on the underside.











15

PIPE IN THE FORM OF A BIRD AND SNAKE EATING A BERRY

POSSIBLY BAGA OR BIDJOGO, GUINEA

First half 20th century

Wood, metal

Length: 4 ½ in, 11 cm

PROVENANCE

Constance McCormick Fearing, Santa Barbara

Tobacco pipes in West Africa are an incredibly diverse art form, encompassing a huge variety of visual themes, techniques, media, and morphology. Their intriguing and sometimes playful forms suggest that the artists who so skillfully crafted them often took a great deal of pleasure in their planning and execution. While tobacco traditionally had significant ceremonial uses, the social and relaxed spirit of smoking seems to influence the design of many pipes, opening the way for unique ideas.

This charming, finely carved pipe is a ready example. Here a crested bird and serpent grapple vigorously for possession of a berry or egg. While the scene and the eager attitude of the contestants suggest a humorous approach, the carving itself is cleverly and masterfully handled, with careful openwork and delicate patterning over the bird's wings. The functional portion of the pipe is integrated into the body of the bird, with the bowl positioned subtly between its raised wings, partially concealing it. The iconography of this pipe is rare, with just a handful of similar examples known.







16

MASK *NTOMO*

BAMANA, MALI

First half 20th century

Wood, cowrie shells, resin/wax, seeds

Height: 20 in, 51 cm

PROVENANCE

Constance McCormick Fearing, Santa Barbara

Among the Bamana, adulthood has historically been attained through instruction within secret initiation societies, collectively called *jow*. Six of these relate to men while women attend only one. Of these, one of the most well-known is *ntomo*, a mutual aid association concerned with the education of uncircumcised boys. This is the first level of the *jow*, and lasts for a period of five years. During this time boys learn secrecy, fortitude and hardship, at certain stages enduring ritual flagellation. The conclusion of the *ntomo* school comes with circumcision, which removes a child's 'androgyny' and allows them to proceed with further initiation as men.

Members wear wooden face masks during the initiation festival at harvest time. Paired with a full-body cloth outfit, they are highly distinctive due to their high, comb-like horns. The quantity of horns on a mask – from two to eight – symbolizes a human being's levels of increased knowledge and also expresses difference in gender. Some masks in the *ntomo* tradition bear additional figures that project out from the crown, depicting anthropomorphic and animal spirits relevant to the teachings of the *jow*.

The profusion of cowrie shells and red seeds that adorns the surface of this *ntomo* mask is common for its type, as is its elongated, geometric face and domed forehead. Its seven horns identify it as an androgynous mask.







17

PAIR OF TWIN MALE FIGURES *ERE IBEJI*

YORUBA, NIGERIA

Late 19th / early 20th century

Wood, metal

Height: 10 ½ in, 27 cm

PROVENANCE

Dr. Jeffrey Hammer (1941–2016).Dr. Hammer was a psychiatrist, scholar, and collector. He collected mostly Yoruba art and conducted field research in Nigeria from 1979 to 1982.
Private collection, USA (acquired in the 1980s from Dr. Hammer) and thence by descent.

Among the Yoruba, twins are regarded as special beings protected by Shango, the god of thunder. They are credited with extraordinary powers, able to bestow wealth upon their families and misfortune upon those who do not pay them the proper respect. When twins die, they are honored and immortalized with carved memorial figures known as *ere ibeji* (*ere*: sacred image; *ibi*: born; *eji*: two). Through these figures the spirits of the departed individuals can still be contacted. The mother provides ritual care to the figures, bathing, dressing, adorning, and feeding them. *Ere ibeji* represent their subjects with adult physiognomies, both male and female, and are often crowned with elaborate coiffures, which are sometimes pigmented in blue.

This fine pair of male figures, coming from the renowned collection of Dr. Jeffrey Hammer, stands upon tall sandals, adorned with bead necklaces, metal rings and triangular, breastplate-like pendants carved in relief. Their strong shoulders and smooth bodies exude a youthful, vital energy. Oversized heads are capped with lobed coiffures of modest height, and the faces are cut with angular features subtly smoothed by years of washing.











18

FIGURATIVE NECKLACE

THULE CULTURE, MAINLAND ALASKA

Circa 1200 to 1800 AD

Marine ivory, seal teeth, Russian glass trade beads, original chord replaced

Height of human figure: 3 in, 7 ½ cm

PROVENANCE

Excavated at Wales, Alaska, Hillside site

Alaskan artistic tradition holds a profusion of carved ivory images, both ritual and utilitarian. They depict animals and human beings as well as abstract and ambiguous forms. Figurative carvings often served the roles of effigies, charms, or talismans and had powerful associations with animal and ancestral spirits. The use of human figures, specifically, remains somewhat mysterious, but they were used in initiations and shamanic practices, and as focus points for metaphysical entreaties.

Ivory and bone were also used to craft adornments and jewelry. Teeth and claws of Arctic mammals were applied in this way, often in the form of strung pendants, drilled through and sometimes arranged with other materials.

The necklace presented here combines a striking ivory figurine with a set of ten seal teeth, interspersed with opaque glass beads obtained from Russian traders. The splendid array is anchored by the figurine, which shows the armless, doll-like composition that is frequently seen in human images from this region. While the features of the figure are only rudimentarily sketched in with blackened incisions, the striking suggestion of naturalism and nuance it imparts is uncanny. The ivory's mottled surface casts a spell of shifting shadows over the body and visage of the figure, conjuring an impression of soft, living flesh. The subtle face, with worn and ghostly features crossed with a horizontal tattoo, seems aware, almost ready to speak.

Complete, intact Alaskan necklaces are extremely rare, making this a very special piece.







19

PRESTIGE AXE

TEKE, REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

19th century

Wood, metal

Height: 13 in, 33 cm

PROVENANCE

Michael Oliver, New York

In the hands of Téké, Mfinu and Laali chiefs, prestige axes are potent symbols of authority, projecting an aura of power both martial and personal. Their distinctive blades, with a broad face and linear connecting bar, are made of hammered iron, and their stout hilts of hardwood. Some axes feature finials in the forms of human heads at the blade junction; others show a recurved, fish-like shape as seen here.

Metal details are plentiful and typical on these axes. This example is liberally adorned with brass furniture tacks acquired through European trade – an indicator of status. The dramatic fusion of curved and straight forms in the design of this axe, combined with its thickness and weight, suggests a marked impression of tension and physical strength.

In *Iron and Pride* (2003), Jan Elsen writes about a similar axe from the collection of the Barbier-Mueller Museum: 'Like the famous brass necklaces, the weapon is an integral part of the parade dress of chiefs. Contrary to what one might think, these axes give, once in hand, a feeling of ultimate swinging, they were certainly formidable weapons.'







20

EXCAVATED BLADE FOR A KNIFE OR SPEAR

PUNUK/THULE CULTURES, MAINLAND ALASKA

Circa 1300–1400 AD

Caribou bone

Height: 8 in, 20 cm

PROVENANCE

Jeffrey Myers, New York

Bone was used extensively in Alaska for the crafting of blades, whether for knives, spears, harpoons, or other utilitarian purposes. Some blades were embellished with great care, incised with enchanting designs of fine lines and an interplay of flowing motifs and sharp notches.

This blade, intended for a knife or spear, would have been used to hunt caribou and musk ox, or smaller game like hares, foxes, and wolverines. It shows beautiful craftsmanship, with delicate line work and nineteen precisely drilled holes, some of extremely small diameter. The larger, pierced holes were used to lash the blade to the spear shaft or knife handle. Viewed vertically, the hole groupings suggest a host of overlapping, abstract faces, evoking a subtle anthropomorphism when combined with the curving silhouette of the blade.

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